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FEATURES

Winchester author Amy Moy's kids books champion diversity, inclusion

DANIELLE KRANTZ | CORRESPONDENT

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Winchester author Amy Moy watches as her daughter, Evie, autographs a copy of her book 'The Polka-Dotted Penguin.' WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF/DANIELLE KRANTZ

Amy Moy wants the world to know it's OK to be different.

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Moy, whose daughter, Evie, has Down syndrome, writes children's books that champion diversity and inclusion. Her first self-published book, "The Polka-Dotted Penguin," tells the story of Dottie, a penguin born with unique polka dots who embarks on a journey of self-acceptance and understanding. Through Dottie's eyes, young readers are inspired to practice kindness and embrace individuality.

Moy, an optometrist living in Winchester, was inspired to write the book after noticing a lack of books to send to Evie's classroom on World Down Syndrome Day, which occurs annually March 21.

"I started out just trying to write for the Down syndrome community," Moy said. "If you ask the parents who get the book who have loved ones with Down syndrome, a lot of them have told me that they've cried because it kind of echoes their journey."

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Winchester resident Amy Moy with a copy of her book 'The Polka-Dotted Penguin,' as well as a stuffed Dottie. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF/DANIELLE KRANTZ

After gaining a large local following, Moy released her second book, "Dottie Meets Mully the Bully," which features Dottie facing unkind behavior from her peer, Mully. The book teaches children how to stand up for themselves in a kind way, with support from friends.

Her third book, "Dottie and the New Student," will be published in September.

Moy said she went on fiverr.com and asked five artists to draw what they thought Dottie should look like. After seeing Indonesia-based illus[illegible] Rami's drawing of the penguin, Moy chose to use his illustrations [illegible] three books.

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"As I go into bullying in the second book and social skills in the third book, it's not so specifically for Down syndrome because I wanted to make it universally relevant to any child who reads it," Moy said. "And they can read into it with their experiences of disability if they have disabilities. But if they don't, everybody's got their own struggles."

Winchester parent Joanna Jamontt discovered Moy's books after another mother praised Moy's books in a Winchester Facebook group. She said the books had taught her 8-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter about uniqueness and treating others with kindness.

"It's really wonderful because it feels like my kids are growing alongside Amy's daughter and she is writing the books that address the things that Evie is experiencing, you know, in her life at school," Jamontt said. "But I think many other kids can also appreciate these types of stories and learn from them."

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Jamontt said she saw first-hand the effect "Dottie Meets Mully the Bully" had on her children. After reading the book to her children for the first time, the next day her son called his sister a mild name. In response, she turned to him and said, "Don't call me that. Please call me Amy" – repeating almost exactly what she had heard in the book.

"That has opened up so many conversations and we have read the book more than a hundred times," Jamontt said. "Every single time my children are frozen with attention, and they pay so much attention to this book. I'm amazed."

Moy gave Jamontt's daughter a plush Dottie penguin. Jamontt sa
a part of the family.

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With a loyal and growing fanbase, Moy decided to launch a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds to release her third book, "Dottie and the New Student." After surpassing her $1,000 goal, the book is set to be released Sept. 5.

Moy said as Evie prepares to enter fourth grade, she considered what skills she wanted her and her peers to be equipped with. She wanted to give Evie the tools she needed to navigate the changing social dynamics of this stage. One key topic is social cliques.

"I want kids in general to know that when you include other people who aren't the same as you, that's the kind and wonderful thing to do. But also if someone comes along and says, 'I want to play with this person but not this person,' that has consequences and is not very kind," Moy said. "And so the new student comes along and tries to befriend Dottie's best friend but doesn't want to play with Dottie because she's slow and doesn't talk."

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Amy and Evie Moy with 'The Polka-Dotted Penguin' and 'Dottie Meets Mully the Bully.' A third Dottie book is expected Sept. 5. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF/DANIELLE KRANTZ

Besides being an author, mother and wife, Moy is an optometrist and an associate professor at the New England College of Optometry, he

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mater. She is also a member of the Winchester Special Education Parents Advisory Council.

"My principle has become to say I only work on my book process if it's fun for me. If it starts to become stressful, then I need to take a break. And so my work and my family come first," Moy said. "So that's kind of how I balance it."

Moy also runs a YouTube channel and Instagram account, and mentors other aspiring authors.

"I wanted other kids to see kids with disabilities as just something typical and something cool. And there's not that many YouTube videos featuring kids with disabilities, so Evie's a very willing partner. We just play games together, do crafts, go to museums," Moy said. "I just filmed that helping other kids to see what Evie's about and that people with disabilities aren't scary. You just have to say hi and get to know them."

Moy mentored a fourth-grader and a high school student on their own books. She said the best advice she can give is to commit to the process.

"The message is that you can do it," Moy said. "It's not easy to publish a book, and you need funds and time to make it happen. So the people who followed through, they listened exactly to every step that I told them to do, and they did it. So I'm really proud of them."

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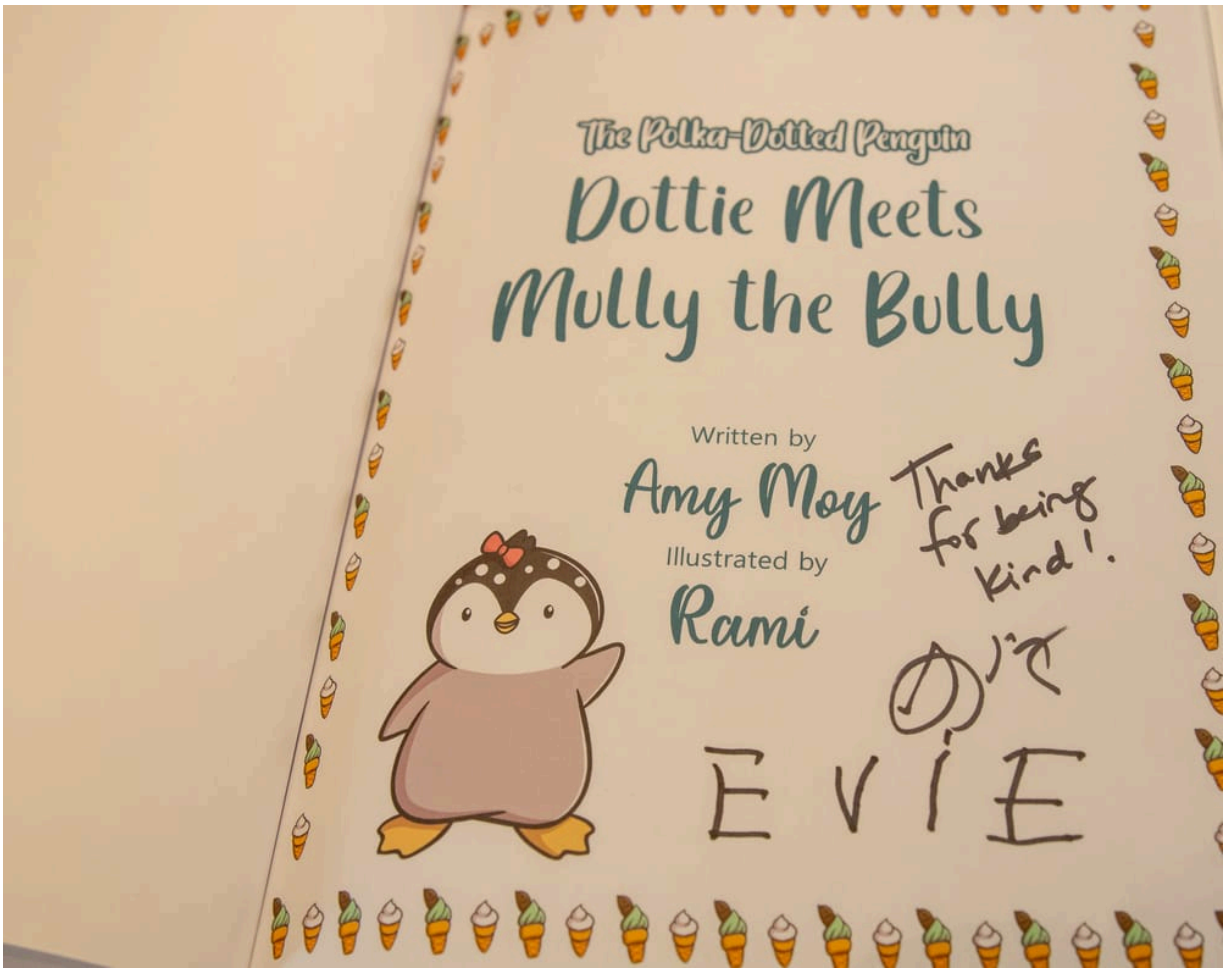

Amy and Evie Moy autograph a copy of 'Dottie Meets Mully the Bully.' WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF/DANIELLE KRANTZ

After gaining a cult following in Winchester, Moy and Evie have become local celebrities. They sign autographs at the local bookstore Book Ends.

"Amy's books are great. They're adorable too," said Amanda Zarni, an employee at Book Ends. "It's great to have authors in the community and when we can partner for things."

The book will be available for purchase at Book Ends and online at Target, Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

This story is part of a partnership between the Winchester News and the Boston University Department of Journalism.

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Well, Winchester, we made it through the weekend with only a coating of snow that amounted to nothing on Sunday afternoon. But during the Feb. 22-23 blizzard, Winchester News once again asked residents to send their snow photos. And here is what we received! Solmaz Amirnazmi said her daughters and

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

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Winchester Community Music School set to expand, upgrade

The big events in Winchester Community Music School always take place in Nichols Performance Hall. With the school and its performances' growing in popularity, the hall and many of its amenities are due for an upgrade. The performance hall is one of the main areas that the school seeks to

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Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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